

## **5 Streetscape**

### **5.1 Setting**

The Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center consists of primarily commercial buildings constructed over the past fifty years. The commercial buildings border several residential developments and, in some instances, are adjacent to older residential properties. While the newer residential developments may have covenants ensuring reasonable architectural conformity, the commercial area had no architectural standards prior to the establishment of the CR overlay district in 1988. With the establishment of the CR overlay district and increased community involvement, recent construction has contributed to a more coherent design.

The following design guidelines are recommended for the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center. These design guidelines are intended to be used for the review of all proposals or applications for new building construction, new additions to existing buildings, new signs, the modification or replacement of existing signs, and the exterior renovation or modification of existing buildings and any other exterior improvements that require the issuance of a permit by Baltimore County.

All uses and structures in the Rural Commercial Center should, to the extent practicable, comply with the design guidelines. It is intended that the Baltimore County Hearing Officer may impose any of these guidelines as a condition for approval of a development plan.

### **5.2 Site Selection and Design**

Prior to selection, a potential site needs to be studied to determine its capability of meeting all the needs of the structures and activities inherent to its proposed utilization. The existing topography, vegetation, water source capability, surface water flow pattern, septic capacity, traffic patterns, and neighboring land uses need to be recorded. The site design must respect all of these factors.

Prior to proceeding with the development of a site, a site design shall be drawn up which addresses vehicle entrance and exit requirements, building setbacks, parking requirements, surface water runoff, signage, lighting, and noise. On-site vehicular movement and parking layout must comply with established engineering standards. Surface structures such as paving, curbs, gutters, retaining walls, and steep slopes must comply with Baltimore County standards.

The impact of noise, traffic, and odor-generating activities must be addressed so as not to become an irritant to neighbors.

The orientation and arrangement of primary elements shall harmonize visually and physically with existing features of the site and surrounding properties. Existing topography and vegetation must be respected. To the greatest extent practicable, vehicular and pedestrian traffic is to be interrelated with adjacent properties. Wherever possible, driveways and parking areas shall be shared in order to improve circulation and to minimize curb cuts.

### **5.3 Building Design**

#### **5.3.1 Design Review Considerations**

All building proposals within the plan area must be reviewed by the Greater Jacksonville Association Board of Directors, or by a designated committee. The Board shall consider the architectural proposal in the context of the following issues:

1. transitions between existing and proposed new buildings;

2. treatment of building elevations;
3. quality of exterior materials;
4. scale of buildings in relation to surrounding structures;
5. roof forms and styles; and,
6. compatibility and appropriateness of proposed structures with other adjacent features.

### 5.3.2 Design Guidelines

Properly siting a building is to locate it harmoniously with its surroundings, weaving it into the existing tapestry of natural and manmade elements with which it will co-exist and interrelate.

For a building to interrelate with its surroundings, it must be in scale with its environment. Imposing masses need to be segmented into volumes and planes relative to their neighbors so as to form a visual balanced composition, proportioned to respect the scale of adjacent structures and natural elements.

Particular shapes invite certain human responses, e.g., roof shapes connote shelter, penetrations of a mass or plane extend an invitation to enter or communicate between exterior and interior. The choice of size, configuration and arrangement of these shapes need to be in concert with each other, with the site and with the neighboring natural and constructed environment.

Simple geometrical shapes such as squares, rectangles, etc., are comparatively uninteresting. However, when these same shapes are part of composition, they can be most interesting and stimulating. A building elevation that is a simple rectangle, with no penetrations, capped with a horizontal parapet is not appropriate. However, that same elevation, topped with a sloping roof, relieved with a variation of plane and penetrated with a composition of shapes, becomes quite stimulating.

The interplay of shapes and planes does far more than add interest to the surface of building, it provides an interplay of the elements. It casts shadows which move and evolve with the progression of the sun, modifying and animating the entire composition. As this composition comes to life visually, it joins with its neighbors to contribute a very positive visual offering to our environment.

Colors and textures need to be warm and inviting, not harsh or foreboding. Earth tones such as reddish browns and forest greens not only blend with nature but are restful and calming. Vivid colors reflect more light and thus demand undue attention.

Surfaces need not be rugged, but visually, textures are warm and friendly while slick surfaces are cold and aloof.

The primary purpose of these guidelines is the development of a village atmosphere. Toward that end the following guidelines apply:

- Franchise architecture which is inconsistent with a village atmosphere is not acceptable.
- Mechanical equipment, loading facilities, and trash containers must be visually screened and not be audible at any residential property. The screens must harmonize with the building and landscape design.
- Continuity of design and materials must be expressed on all elevations of a building. Flues, vent stacks, etc. are to be treated as aesthetic elements congruent with the building design.

- All site elements, i.e., signage, landscaping, lighting, etc., are to be treated as an extension of the building design.
- Building entrances facing the public road are preferred. Blank walls facing a public road are not appropriate.
- Flat roofs are strongly discouraged. Pitched roofs are recommended. The use of shopping-center-style mansards to disguise a flat roof is not appropriate.
- The exterior building design, including roof style, color, materials, architectural form, and detailing, are to be consistent on all elevations.

New buildings must be designed so as to be compatible in size and scale with existing buildings. Buildings should have a village-type character. Examples of existing commercial buildings exhibiting acceptable architecture include:

- 3430 Sweet Air Road (Blockbuster Video)
- 14300 Jarrettsville Pike (Crestar Bank)
- 3312 Paper Mill Road (Gaylord Brooks)
- 14237 Jarrettsville Pike
- 14231 Jarrettsville Pike (Sparks Bank)

#### **5.4 Removal of Utility Poles and Overhead Wires**

One of the most visible and dramatic improvements that could be made to the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center streetscape would be to make the vast tangle of overhead wires and poles disappear. Most residents in the community, particularly those living in or near the heart of Jacksonville, regard these as unsightly and undesirable. Many communities and some cities around the country (including Palo Alto, CA, Ann Arbor, MI, and San Antonio, TX) have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to remove their above-ground utility hardware. Many have tried and failed, largely due to the immense expense involved.

The utility hardware cluttering our streetscape belongs to the Baltimore Gas and Electric, Bell Atlantic, and Comcast corporations. GJA has explored the possibility of having BGE bury their cables and wires, and a rough cost estimate was obtained. No discussions have yet been held with either Bell Atlantic or Comcast.

Catonsville is one community in Baltimore County that has recently succeeded in having the lines buried, but then only for a distance of two blocks. The Catonsville project was funded through the establishment of a Benefits Overlay District, which required special State enabling legislation.

This approach would be one possible avenue for Jacksonville. Another would be the creation of a special (property) tax assessment district that would add an additional levy on both business and residential property owners in the district within whatever boundaries are established. A public referendum would be required to do this. No communities in the County have succeeded in establishing a taxing district to fund an infrastructure project any time recently (if ever) as they are apparently politically unpopular. If Jacksonville were to ever succeed in this, strong support would be needed from the Third and Sixth District County Councilmen.

## **5.5 Landscaping**

Controlling the growth of the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center must be viewed from the perspective of protecting, as well as enhancing, the environment. Keeping this goal in mind necessitates maintaining the rural character of the area by encouraging the preservation of the small amount of agriculture that still exists in the surrounding area, afforestation, reforestation and wildlife management. Property in the area relies on the use of wells and septic systems; therefore, the use of native plants in the landscaping is to be encouraged in order to eliminate the need for harsh chemicals or excessive amounts of water usage. Aesthetically there should be a buffer area between the commercial and residential properties.

### **5.5.1 Purpose**

Site design for future development is extremely important in preserving the character of the surrounding area. Landscape plans are required for all new development and for improvements being made to existing structures in order to assure protection of the site's natural features as well as to recognize existing environmental conditions, thereby providing for their long term protection. These plans must be tailored to the location, design, and use of the particular site.

### **5.5.2 Landscape Plan**

Landscaping should be provided as part of any site plan. The landscape plan shall incorporate landscaping requirements as suggested under the General Planting Requirements in Section 5.5.3. They may include plant materials such as trees, shrubs, ground covers, perennials, annuals and other elements such as decorative rock, water, sculpture, art, walls, fences, paving materials and street furniture. Along with the site plan, the applicant shall submit a landscape plan. The landscape plan shall describe the location of trees, both existing and new, and address tree maintenance, surface water management, re-vegetation, establishment of vegetated buffers, and the method of providing protection of any special flood hazard areas.

Plans are to be reviewed by the Greater Jacksonville Association Board of Directors, or by a designated committee.

### **5.5.3 General Planting Requirements to be Observed**

- **Plant Type** - A mixture of hardy flowering and decorative evergreen and deciduous trees may be planted. The area beneath trees shall be mulched, as shall beds planted with shrubs, ground cover, perennials, or annuals. Native plants are the primary choices for landscaping, since they raise no concerns about possible adverse effects on local water quality and require minimal use of insect and fertilizer chemicals.
- **Planting Specifications** -
  - All deciduous trees shall have a minimum caliper of two inches, shall be nursery grown, shall be of substantially uniform size and shape, and have straight trunks.
  - Evergreen trees shall be a minimum of five feet in height.
  - Only nursery grown plant materials shall be acceptable and all trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals and ground covers shall be planted according to horticultural standards.

- Provision is to be made by the applicant for regular watering and maintenance until such plant material is established.
- Selected plant specimens should be hardy for the climate of this area and appropriate in terms of function and size.
- Any dead or dying trees and/or shrubs shall be replaced by the applicant during the next planting season.

#### **5.5.4 Function and Materials**

- Buffers shall provide a year-round visual screen in order to minimize adverse impacts. It may consist of fencing, evergreens, berms, or combinations thereof to achieve the same objectives.
- Planting is intended to provide privacy for an adjacent property, to lessen traffic noise, to protect from wind, and to direct pedestrian usage of the site.
- Plants used in buffer screens shall be sufficiently large and planted in such a fashion that a year round screen at least eight feet in height will be produced within two growing seasons.
- Deciduous trees may be used for visual enhancement of the site as well as to provide shade.
- Safety - Plant material should not cause visual impairment for entrance and exit areas of the site. Consideration should be given to potential hazards to the community, e.g., the use of poisonous trees or shrubs, or debris from falling leaves and/or blossoms.
- A suggested list of native plants which do well in this area is given in Appendix D.

#### **5.5.5 Specific Planting Areas and Guidelines for Non-Residential Development**

- Provide at least a ten-foot landscaped strip between the road right-of-way and the parking lot. This may include deciduous trees for shade; low growing shrubs, with a four-foot maximum height; or a planting of perennials and grasses. If this ten-foot area is sloped in any way, then slope protection measures must be incorporated in the landscape plan. These plantings should not interfere with utilities, roadways, sidewalks, sight distances or street lights.
- Provide walkways of concrete or brick paving along the major roadways as well as in front of commercial businesses to provide pedestrian use and safety in the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center. Connect widely-spaced commercial property by means of paved pathways which are in keeping with the aesthetics of the building architecture.
- A mix of trees and shrubs at least ten feet in width must be planted along the periphery of commercial development adjacent to homesites. This buffer planting must provide a year-round screen that attains an eight-foot height within two growing seasons. A twenty-five-foot strip of existing woodlands may be preserved in lieu of this new planting.
- All service and utility areas shall be screened around their perimeters by a buffer strip a minimum of five feet wide. Where more intensive land uses (e.g., commercial) abut less intensive uses (e.g., residential), a buffer strip twenty-five feet in width which includes a mix of trees and shrubs shall be required. This buffer strip may incorporate both fencing compatible with the building design and plant material to ensure adequate screening.

- Chain link fences should not be used where they are visible from public roads and adjacent residential properties. When such fencing is necessary, it should be finished in black. The use of barbed or razor wire is forbidden.

## 5.6 Parking Lot and Street Lighting

The intensity and distribution of light shall be limited to the optimum ambient light level required for safe pedestrian activity.

The quality of light shall be warm and natural, providing accurate color resolution of illuminated objects. Lighting shall be designed so as not to illuminate neighboring properties or present an irritation to neighbors. The design of lighting fixtures should be standardized throughout the commercial center. The use of cut-off style fixtures is recommended, such that the light source is not directly visible from off of the immediate site.

Floodlighting used for athletic or other special activities may use non-standard fixtures most appropriate for the specific purpose, but adhere to the spirit of the remainder of the guidelines stated herein, i.e., they are to be focused strictly on the activity being illuminated.

All lighting must be designed and installed so as to avoid unnecessary illumination of the night sky.

## 5.7 Signage

The purpose of signage guidelines is to improve and enhance Jacksonville's rural character so as to be more inviting and friendly to the community and the public at large. The business area with Four Corners as its hub has many good features but could be improved by attention given to the uniformity of signage and, in some instances, decrease of signage clutter. Inconsistent signage standards contribute to an image of an expanding, unplanned commercial strip (Figure 2).

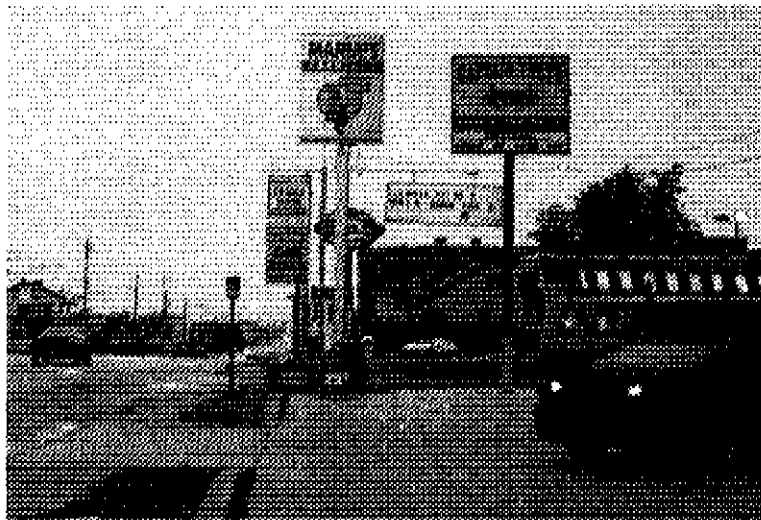


Figure 2: Inconsistent signage leaves a cluttered appearance.

Some good examples exist of attempts to limit the size of signs and control visual clutter. The Blockbuster Video business is a good example of cooperation between business and community

to develop a site in a way which is both responsive to business needs and to the desires of the community for a low-key, attractive design blending well with the rural residential nature of the area (Figure 3). However, there are also signs which are disproportionate in size or visual content (Figure 4).



Figure 3: An attractive and functional business site in Jacksonville.

It is recognized that the cost of signs is a substantial business expense, and that not all changes can be made immediately. However, as the need arises for new signs, it is expected that the business community will work within these guidelines in order to achieve a uniform visual presentation for the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center. Such a presentation not only provides for the identification of businesses, but also provides a pleasing venue for visitors, encouraging them to stay and explore. In this way appropriate signage can add to, rather than detract from, the various commercial enterprises. The amortization period for unacceptable signs is described in Section 4.8.

A well-designed sign consists of the following elements: composition, material, color, size, layout, and installation and/or placement. Good signage provides for ease of communication between the community and the services provided while being pleasing and complementary to its surroundings. Clear, uncluttered signs provide good visual stimulation.

#### **5.7.1 Goal and Recommendations**

The goal is to provide guidelines for signage in the Jacksonville Rural Commercial Center that will meet the needs of the business community and also be homogeneous and aesthetically pleasing.



Figure 4: An example of a sign which is unnecessarily large.

It is recommended that:

- discussions take place with the State Highway Administration concerning the location and size of route and road signs, in order to reduce the visual clutter at the intersection of Routes 145 and 146 by incorporating all signs into the overhead signs along with the traffic lights; and
- signs announcing **Welcome to Jacksonville** be placed on the approaches to the the village, along with a posted speed limit, in order to clearly inform motorists that they are entering a Rural Commercial Center.

#### 5.7.2 Signage Guidelines

1. Each business shall be allowed one sign with a maximum of 25 square feet per face, preferably on the customer entrance side of the building, or two smaller signs, the total area not to exceed 40 square feet, one at the entrance and one on the building front or positioned monument-style on the ground in front of the building (see Figure 3).
2. Signs should have white lettering on a dark background, preferably an earth-tone (Figure 5).
3. Signs should be installed on the building front, perhaps the lintel where practical, but if a sign must be free-standing it is recommended that a monument-style rather than a pole- or



pillar-style of mounting be used (Figure 6).

4. The height of freestanding signs is limited to 15 feet above the nearest curb elevation.
5. Complexes of shops or offices should use building or center names, e.g., Manor Center, or street numbers for ease of identification of businesses rather than extensive directories.
6. All signs must be set back at least 15 feet from face of curb, so that a driver's vision is not impaired.
7. Window signs may not exceed 20% of glass area.
8. Lighting must be shielded from vehicular and pedestrian traffic and directed away from neighboring sites. Light intensity should not exceed 75 foot-candles at the sign face. Back lighting shall be discouraged, but if necessary, it shall be limited to name lettering and logo only.
9. Lighting must be shielded in such a way as to avoid unnecessary illumination of the night sky. Sign lighting should be directed from overhead and be directed generally downward, and should be no brighter than necessary, especially when businesses are closed.
10. Temporary commercial signs should be limited to one per road frontage, with a maximum size of 25 square feet, and may remain in place for a maximum of 30 days within any 120-day period.
11. Exterior free-standing signs advertising specific products are prohibited.
12. Cigarette advertising on outdoor signs is strictly prohibited.
13. A business directory sign at a shopping center is permitted if absolutely necessary, although not recommended. It should meet general signage requirements, be of a dark, earthtone background with white lettering, located at each entrance of a shopping center, with one line per business to a maximum of five lines. Illumination shall meet other stated requirements and be confined to the face of the sign. Changeable copy space should be limited to no more than two lines incorporated into the directory and not freestanding (e.g., see Figure 5).
14. All abandoned or discontinued signs shall be removed from the premises within 30 days by the owner.
15. Signs advertising special events may be posted ahead of the event and must be removed at the close of the event.

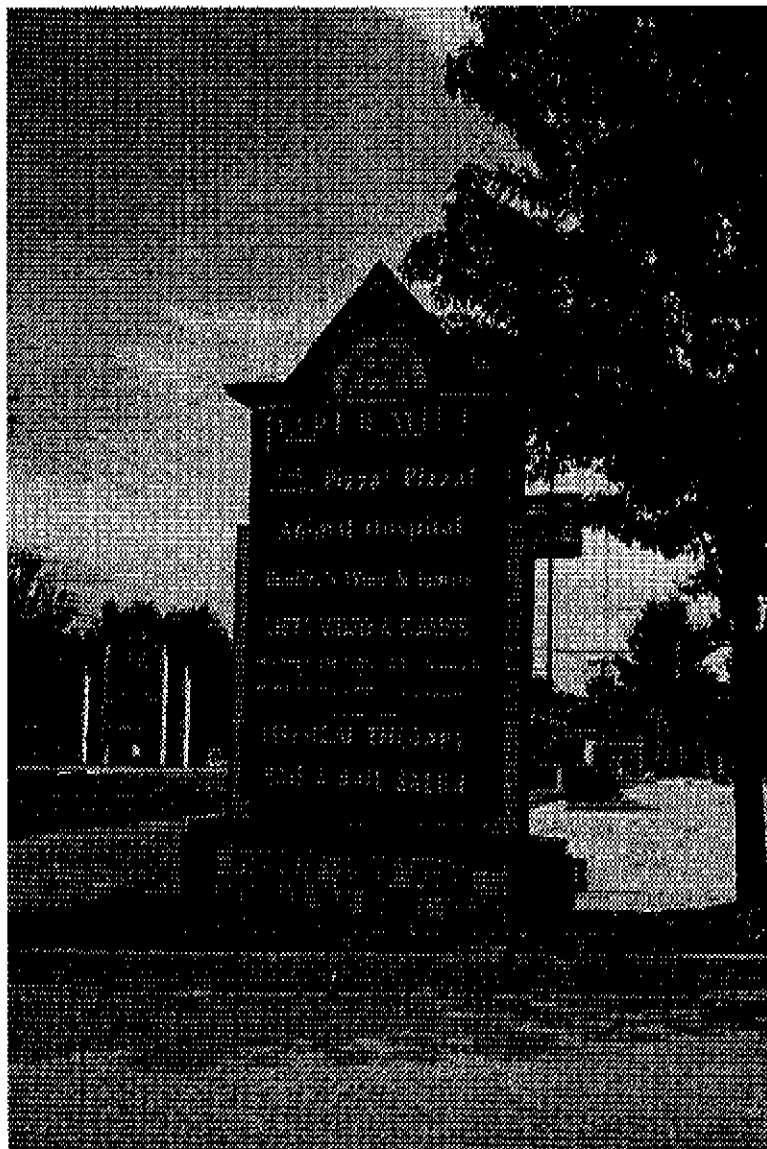


Figure 5: A well-designed earth-tone sign, although the large number of business names displayed on this particular example is not encouraged.

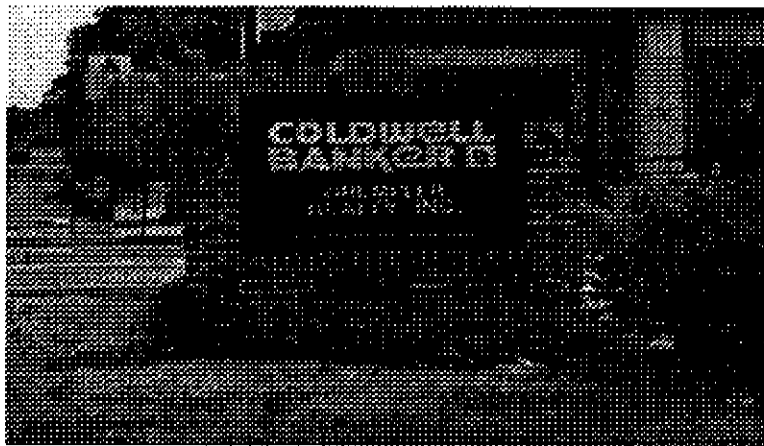


Figure 6: An attractive monument-style sign.